

Using Heron at the University of Lincoln - a pilot study.

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The University of Lincoln is relatively new, and inevitably, our library resources lack the depth and breadth of a historical collection. With an ambitious programme of campus development, (including a new library in 2004), university funds are strictly limited, and librarians have worked closely with academics to devise strategies to best provide library support for approximately 10,000 undergraduates and an increasing number of postgraduates. Our solution has been to develop an approach that seeks to ensure that students have best access to resources. This approach involves collecting detailed information concerning reading list requirements and key texts. We use this information to fine-tune the loan periods for high-demand items at specific points during semester, suggest and make available alternative and supplementary texts, and also to identify appropriate items to digitise. In 2004, prior to the extension to the CLA digitisation licence, we decided to pilot the use of Heron, to obtain digital extracts. As part of the pilot, we also decided to evaluate and assess the student experience of using digitised extracts, from both a pedagogical and a value for money viewpoint.

Heron pilot

The pilot was based on a media and design critical studies unit undertaken by 100 second year Media Production undergraduates, who are predominantly full time students living on campus. The academic was asked to identify key texts and a list of material to be used each week was developed. Items that appeared on the list but were not held in the library, were considered to be of particular importance. The list of required texts was sent to Heron, which dealt with copyright clearance and digitisation, and calculated the cost

of providing each extract. Initially, estimated fees exceeded the funds available for the pilot, and we negotiated with the academic to make alternative arrangements in order to remain within budget.

In general, we asked Heron to request document scans from the British Library, as this saved staff time. However, one item was only available from the University Library and we scanned and submitted the item to Heron. As this document was not owned by the British Library this enabled an additional text to be added to the Heron library which could potentially benefit a number of other institutions. Once the material was available through Heron, the documents were placed on our virtual learning environment, through notice boards which can only be viewed by the students for whom the material was purchased. The use of this facility also enabled a count to be recorded of the number of times a notice board had been accessed.

Survey findings and analysis

We carried out a survey, using questionnaires, to find out how students had used Heron, and also how they rated the experience. We also analysed student bibliographies, to establish how often they referred to this material, and the extent to which they referred to other, non- Heron material.

Our results showed that 89% of the students said that they had read the Heron digitised material provided for them, and that 48% of the 374 references cited in bibliographies were from this material. From this, we concluded that students will make extensive use of digital extracts, when they are available.

One issue that concerned academic and library staff was the potential to transfer costs from the university to the student, as students would pay to print digital extracts, rather than the library, or academic department paying to

provide photocopies or additional copies of texts. However, this did not appear to be a major issue, as it was identified as a problem by only one student. To some extent, this may be due to the way students viewed the material, as the survey showed that 40% had read the extracts on screen.

Cost and value for money issues were considered very carefully, as unlike material that is purchased outright, the Heron material is only available during the period for which it is purchased. In the case of this pilot, the nature of the material that was used was an important factor, as many of the books were out of print, and even supposing they could be obtained, would have been expensive. If we had not used Heron, it is also likely that such a large cohort of students would have requested numerous interlibrary loans. We therefore concluded that in this case, the costs of using Heron could be justified in terms of enabling equality of access to material.

Some academics were concerned that easy access to digital extracts would mean that we were "spoon-feeding" information to students, and that they would not have the incentive to read and research widely. However, the results of our survey, and analysis of student bibliographies, did not support this contention, with 52% of references found to be from alternative sources including books, journals and websites. When questioned as to what information sources they would have used for the assignment had the digitised material not being available, the majority of students answered that they would have used the lecturer's reading list, searched the library catalogue or gone straight to Google. From this, we concluded that students were prepared to make use of the information sources that were familiar to them ; the existence of digital extracts did not affect this.

Finally, a major advantage of using the Heron service was that we were able to make resources available 24 hours a day seven

days a week, on or off campus. Our survey results showed that this type of availability is highly valued by students.

Future plans

Following the arrival of the CLA trial digitisation licence, we have experienced an increase in the demand for digitised texts, particularly to support courses with large numbers of students, and for groups of distance learners. Academics are experimenting with the use of such material in their teaching; for example, by designing course delivery around a series of digitised seminar readings. Inevitably, we also have many requests for items not covered by the licence, including non-UK and non-standard items, which we request through Heron.

As we scale-up our digitisation service, we will consider using OCR (at present, we use pdf files), and also using Heron PackTracker to manage our records. We will continue to monitor the cost of providing this service in terms of value for money, and will work with our academic colleagues to embed new methods of accessing information within the student experience.